

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5219

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Natural Resources, Ocean & Recreation, February 12, 2007

Title: An act relating to the Northwest weather and avalanche center.

Brief Description: Regarding the Northwest weather and avalanche center.

Sponsors: Senator Jacobsen.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Natural Resources, Ocean & Recreation: 1/24/07, 2/12/07 [DPS].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES, OCEAN & RECREATION

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5219 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Jacobsen, Chair; Rockefeller, Vice Chair; Fraser, Hargrove, Poulsen, Spanel and Stevens.

Staff: Curt Gavigan (786-7437)

Background: The Northwest Weather and Avalanche Center (NWAC) provides weather and avalanche forecasts and information for Washington and northern Oregon through phone consultations, public hotline recordings, and the Internet. NWAC gathers its mountain weather data from a network that includes direct observers, the National Weather Service, and the 42 weather stations that it maintains or helps to maintain. NWAC forecast staff also present avalanche, weather, and snow safety seminars.

NWAC is currently administered by the United States Forest Service and housed at the National Weather Service office in Seattle. NWAC is funded cooperatively, with contributions from entities including the Forest Service, National Park Service, state and local governments, and private organizations.

NWAC's annual budget approaches \$300,000. For 2006, Washington State agencies provided about 45 percent of NWAC's funding. The State Parks and Recreation Commission provided \$89,000, and the Department of Transportation provided \$45,000.

Summary of Bill: The State Parks and Recreation Commission (Commission) is directed to negotiate with the United States Forest Service to develop an intergovernmental agreement for the transfer of NWAC to the Commission. The two agencies may agree to cooperatively

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administer NWAC. The agencies may also determine which will have administrative control over NWAC employees, equipment, and facilities.

In developing the interagency agreement, the Commission must work to include commitments by the Commission and Forest Service to seek sufficient funding to allow NWAC to maintain its current level of service. The Commission must also work with other entities, such as neighboring states and private organizations, to seek long term funding for NWAC.

Beginning July 1, 2009, NWAC will be administered within the Commission, or cooperatively, pursuant to an agreement with the Forest Service. A fund is established to accept monies for NWAC.

The Commission must provide progress reports to the Legislature in 2007 and 2008.

EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY RECOMMENDED SUBSTITUTE AS PASSED COMMITTEE (Natural Resources, Ocean & Recreation): The Commission must invite the United States Forest Service, the National Weather Service, and the National Park Service to develop an intergovernmental plan and recommendations that seek to ensure that the NWAC has the resources to continue operating at its current level of service into the future. The Commission and participating agencies may invite other public and private entities to participate in the development of the plan and recommendations.

In developing the plan and recommendations, the Commission must seek to address issues including administrative control over the NWAC and ensuring cooperative long-term funding for the NWAC.

No state agency may assume administrative control over the NWAC without Legislative authorization.

The Commission must provide the Legislature with updates on the status of the plan and recommendations in December 2007 and 2008.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed, except for sections 3 and 4 which take effect July 1, 2009.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: The Northwest Weather and Avalanche Center provides a valuable service to the people of Washington State, which has saved many lives. Users of the service include ski areas, recreational users of mountain areas, travelers, and the Department of Transportation. The program has received cooperative funding for 30 years, but contributions are not keeping pace with costs. Stable funding is needed for the Center to maintain its current level of service.

OTHER: The State Parks and Recreation Commission is willing to work cooperatively with other entities if directed to do so by the Legislature, but has no position on this bill. The

Forest Service is also neutral, but wants to continue supporting the Center as it has done since 1976.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Mark Moore, NWAC; Brad Colman, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration; Duncan Wowat, Mt. Baker Ski Area; Benj Wadsworth, Friends of the Northwest Weather and Avalanche Center.

OTHER: Fred Romero, State Parks and Recreation Commission; Mike Heilman, United States Forest Service.